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A Word From Tim Downs - September 2011



Dear Friends,

Charting Priorities for Our Lives

As the fall calendar unfolds, our conference and associations are hitting full stride. The Conference staff and I are “on the road again”, working with churches, preaching, speaking, planning, and much more.

Our newly elected Board of Directors held our first meeting in September, and they have begun to chart priorities for our lives together in the program year 2011—2012. Here are some of the matters we discussed:



1. Upon reviewing our **Treasurer's Report** through August, it appears that we can anticipate a deficit of \$30,000-\$40,000 in 2011. We have authorized covering that shortfall through the reserve fund, but as we plan for 2012, we need to address this continuing pattern of deficits in our financial life
2. Our staff is putting the foundations in place for the **PATHWAYS program** which starts this fall. The first church to gather a significant number of participants is our newest church, Safe Harbor Family Church UCC in Jackson, MS. This is the first year in which we have offered a United Church of Christ History and Polity class in the fall. This class will be the history and polity component of PATHWAYS. We are recruiting other conferences to participate, and are developing our partnership with Lancaster Theological Seminary, and working with the Center for Progressive Renewal to develop our instructional platform. I have been elected to serve on the Board of Trustees of Lancaster Theological Seminary in part to represent our partnership with them in that setting.
3. Debbie Spearman reported that her job description is evolving as she begins to complete the follow-up to the Campaign to **Transform Churches and Transform Lives**. She is providing support and resources to church for financial development and stewardship education. She will be going to Cleveland this fall to become acquainted with the work of the national UCC, and the ways in which we can work more closely with them.
4. We are continuing to seek ways in which to **communicate better**, and received comments and recommendations concerning our web site, our online presence, and expanding the ways in which we communicate.
5. The Board reviewed the prospect of renewing the **lease** in our current location when it is due in May, 2012.
6. The **Global Theological Education program**, in collaboration with Lancaster



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Headlines from the United Church of Christ

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Theological Seminary is gearing up for a trip to Thailand in January. Additionally, we collaborated with the Fuller Center for Housing to support a group traveling this summer to the Democratic Republic of the Congo to build houses and deliver a sawmill in August.

7. Our conference hosted the **regional gathering of conference ministers** of the Southern Region of the UCC. This meeting resulted in the prospect of some exciting collaborations among the conference in this region, around youth ministries, leadership consultations, PATHWAYS, financial management, and financial development.

8. We reorganized the **task forces and advisory committees** of the Board for this program year.

In summary, this promises to be a year of tremendous program opportunities, and you are served by an energetic and visionary Board.

Follow this link to see a [complete list of our Southeast Conference Board of Directors](#). [Link here for the SEC Board of Director's contact information](#). Please keep in touch with our board.

Peace,

Tim Downs
Timothy C. Downs

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TRANSFORMING CHURCHES, TRANSFORMING LIVES

Southeast Conference UNITED CHURCH of CHRIST

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UCC History and Polity

UCC History and Polity Courses

Facilitators: Tim Downs, Teaching Assistant: Leah Lyman Barner, IT Support: Gregg Carlson

The purpose of this course is to explore the history, polity, theologies, and practices of the United Church of Christ and its predecessor denominations. The course will include exploration of current ecumenical conversations, denominational identity, African-American traditions within the UCC, case studies around current issues of polity and structure, justice and witness, emerging trends within the United Church of Christ, and more. This course will fulfill the history and polity requirement for ordination or privilege of call in the UCC.

The Fall, 2011 offering of the course "The History, Polity and Practices of the United Church of Christ", will be a hybrid distance learning course, with regular webinars available for interaction among participants and facilitators, face to face meetings will be made available as well as on-line engagement.

2011 Fall Course: Beginning on Wednesday evening , August 24th with a required webinar orientation to the instructional model, the technology, and introductions, the class will continue through Saturday, November 5th.

■ The course can be audited by signing through the Center for Progressive Renewal.

■ Registration for the History and Polity Class Registration is sponsored through The Center for Progressive Renewal

If you have further questions you may email **Tim Downs**, SEC Conference Minister, directly .

>> Click here for **History and Polity Resources**.

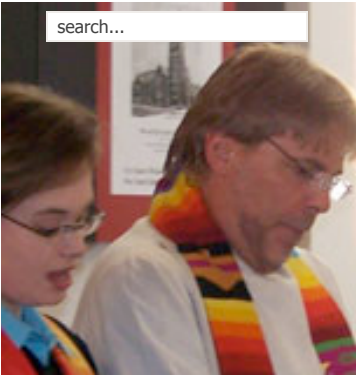
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Online Stewardship Class



Online Stewardship Class kicks off for Southeast Conference Churches
Congratulations to the **six SEC churches** who enrolled in the Center for Progressive Renewal's 5 week online class: **"Designing a Stewardship Plan for you Church."** For the next 5 weeks, six SEC churches will be participating in the Center for Progressive Renewal's (CPR) online class which is designed to instruct and equip them with creating a comprehensive stewardship plan.

The following SEC churches are participating:

- Central Congregational UCC, GA
- Montgomery First Congregational UCC, AL
- Charleston Circular Congregational UCC, SC
- Montgomery Community Congregational UCC, AL
- Open Table Mobile UCC, AL
- Knoxville Church of the Savior UCC, TN



They will do some strategic planning and learn some key stewardship program components. The class will be led by Coy James, *Director of Stewardship & Communication for the Cathedral of Hope UCC* (Dallas, TX). The 1st and last week is conducted online and the in between classes are done independently with readings, assignments and on line forums. If you'd like to learn more about a class like this for your church, please contact **Debbie Spearman**, 800-903-1535, at the Conference Office.

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THE MORGANS

The Family that Prays Together Stays Together

September 14, 2011

Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles
James E. Donald, Chairman
2 Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, SE
Suite 458, Balcony Level, East Tower
Atlanta, GA 30334-4909

Attn: Chairman, James E. Donald

Dear Chairman Donald and Members of the Board:

In an Order Suspending the Execution of Sentence of Death, issued on July 16, 2007 with regard to Mr. Troy Davis' case, you stated, "The members of the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles will not allow an execution to proceed in this State unless and until its members are convinced that there is no doubt as to the guilt of the accused." I commend you on the extraordinary wisdom you've demonstrated by your commitment to abide by this strong moral statement. Your role as the final 'check and balance' on the judicial system requires at least this much caution, if we are to prevent the State of Georgia from the possibility of making an irreversible and inexcusable error. The scheduled execution of Mr. Davis by the State of Georgia on September 21, 2011 has again placed us on the precipice of making this precise irreversible error.

Because there remains "reasonable doubt"; in fact, because there remains overwhelming doubt that Mr. Troy Davis is the one who murdered Officer Mark MacPhail [My prayers have been offered for his family.] I would like to offer to the Board of Pardons and Paroles a fail-proof opportunity to spare the life of a person, who most clearly meets the moral standard, regarding guilt or innocence, which you've set for yourselves. Because, I have sinned and fallen short of God's expectations of me, and to avoid the risk of executing an innocent man, I respectfully offer to you the following alternative.

I hereby request that you take appropriate and immediate steps to prevent the execution of Troy Davis, currently scheduled for September 21, 2011.

If you are not willing to do so and/or if you are not willing to reconsider his case, **I, MARVIN L. MORGAN, DO HEREBY REQUEST THAT YOU AUTHORIZE THE STATE OF GEORGIA TO TAKE MY LIFE INSTEAD OF THAT OF TROY DAVIS, AND ALLOW TROY TO BE SET FREE. I AM AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY TO BE TAKEN INTO CUSTODY SO THIS REQUEST MAY BE IMPLEMENTED.**

Thank you very much for your positive consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Marvin L. Morgan
Minister of Pastoral Care & Counseling
First Congregational United Church of Christ, Atlanta, GA
And Past National Moderator, United Church of Christ's General Synod
[I do hereby certify that I am of sound mind and am fully aware of the nature and full implications of this request.]

1332 Oakcrest Drive, SW, Atlanta, Georgia 30311-3056 (404) 696-7590



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News From Our Local Churches - September

Peace Congregational Church UCC, Clemson, SC helped plan and lead a service at Clemson University where over 500 people attended, called "Remembering September 11, 2001: Looking Back-Looking Forward Toward Compassion, Peace and Reconciliation." [Link here to read more on this event.](#)

Pilgrim United Church of Christ, Birmingham
Janet Weidler has announced her resignation as pastor. The congregation is currently searching for an interim minister.

Safe Harbor Family Church UCC, Jackson, MS
Andre Vlok, co-pastor has moved to Texas, and Pam Walsh continues to serve along with a staff of four others. The church recently scheduled a daylong meeting with Tim Downs to do long range planning and seek ways to strengthen their relationship with the UCC as a newly affiliated church. They will be the first church to be involved with the new PATHWAYS program. *Staff of Safe Harbor pictured right.*



Transforming Churches Transforming Lives Union Chapel, Tougaloo College, Jackson MS, has paid its contribution in full to the Campaign to **Transform Churches and Transform Lives**, with the presentation of a check to the Conference minister on September 11th. *Union Chapel-Tougaloo College Congregation pictured below receiving certificate from Tim Downs for their capital campaign contribution.*



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Atlanta UCC Churches Join in Witness Against the Execution of Troy Davis

In the time leading up to the execution of Troy Davis on September 21st, by the state of Georgia, an execution which was protested by leaders as diverse as Bob Barr, Jimmy Carter, and the Pope, the UCC churches of Atlanta made their voices heard. [Link here to read more](#) on participation by Atlanta UCC members and UCC national.

Pleasant Hill Community UCC Reaching the Completion of Renovations

Pleasant Hill Community UCC has watched with anticipation as the major renovations have expanded their facility to accommodate their growing congregation. They are hoping to move into their facility at the end of October.

First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, Nearing Completion of Rebuilding

After over ten years of planning, and securing a major loan from the Cornerstone Fund of the Unite Church of Christ, First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, is nearing the completion of the major renovations to their historic building. They hope to move in at the beginning of Advent, or at the latest, the beginning of the New Year.

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Lifting Up . . . September 2011

We lift up the family and friends of **Mark Allen MacPhail**, a Savannah police officer shot and killed on August 19, 1989.



We lift up the family and friends of **Troy Anthony Davis**, convicted of his murder and put to death by lethal injection September 21, 2011. We lift up the family and friends of **James Byrd, Jr.** chained to the back of a pick-up truck and dragged to his death June 7, 1998. We lift up the family and friends of **Lawrence Russell Brewer** convicted of his murder and put to death by lethal injection September 21, 2011.

We lift up the **family and friends** of all murder victims.
We lift up the family and friends of all who sit on death row.

We lift up our **lawmakers**. We lift up our wardens, prison guards, and those whose job it is to administer lethal injections.

We lift up our country. We lift up each other.

We wish **Debbie Spearman** God speed as she travels to UCC National Office in Cleveland, Ohio to meet with Don Hill and others from the Financial Development Ministry Team.

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GEORGIA/SOUTH CAROLINA ASSOCIATION

**SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE
UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

Many Voices, One in Christ

3 Kelso At Peyton Dr. SW
Atlanta Georgia 30311
September 27, 2011

Dear Churches of the Georgia /South Carolina Association of the UCC:

Our fall meeting of the GA/SC Association will be held on Saturday, October 15, 2011 at Pilgrimage United Church of Christ, 3755 Sandy Plains Road, Marietta, GA 30066. Rev. Kimberleigh Buchanan is the Pastor. Our meeting begins at 9:30 am and will end at 2:00 pm.

At this meeting, we will hold an Ecclesiastical Council to consider Laura Arnold for ordination, the reception of Kirkwood United Church of Christ, and a panel discussion on Creating Holy Space.

Enclosed is a registration form for the fall meeting. Please complete and return the form to Blair Bonds at 1879 Spring Avenue, East Point GA 30344.

We look forward to your participation in this meeting.

Sincerely,

Cornelius L. Watts, Jr.

Cornelius L. Watts, Jr.
Moderator of the GA/SC Association of the SECUCC

Fall Meeting
October 15, 2011

Theme: *"Creating Holy Space"*

- 9:30 A.M. Registration, Breakfast, Gathering
- 10:00 A.M. Welcome and Ecclesiastical Council
- ❖ Consideration of Laura Arnold for Ordination
 - ❖ Consideration of reception of Kirkwood UCC, Atlanta, Ga. as a UCC congregation.
- 11:30 A.M. Morning Worship
- 12:00P.M. Lunch
- 12:45 P.M. Business Meeting
- ❖ Selection of Nominating Committee for the search for GA/SC Moderator and Vice Moderator
 - ❖ Treasurer's Report
- 1:10 P.M. Panel Discussion – *"Creating Holy Space"*
- ❖ Pilgrimage UCC
 - ❖ Virginia-Highland Church
 - ❖ Circular Congregational Church, UCC
 - ❖ First Congregational Church, UCC
 - ❖ To be Announced
- 2:15 P.M. Closing Reflections

Georgia – South Carolina Association of the United Church of Christ

Registration – Fall Meeting

Saturday, October 15, 2011

**Pilgrimage United Church of Christ
3755 Sandy Plains Road
Marietta, GA 30066**

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ *State:* _____

Phone: _____ *E-Mail:* _____

Church Affiliation: _____

City: _____ *State:* _____

DELEGATE _____ *CLERGY* _____ *MEMBER IN DISCERNMENT* _____

VISITOR _____

FEE: \$25.00

Please mail registration form and fee (checks should be made out to GA-SC Association) to:

Blair Bonds, GA/SC Association Treasurer

1879 Spring Avenue

East Point, GA 30344

404.968.9168

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Conference News - September



March for Justice

The decision of the State of Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles announced this month to allow the execution of **Troy Davis** to proceed is not a decision that advances justice in this great state, but is an echo of another and more troubled time in race relations. The Southeast Conference and the United Church of Christ are proud of our churches and clergy who have continued our long tradition of fighting for justice. [> Follow link to read more on this injustice.](#)

Alabama-Tennessee Association Fall Meeting "Making Connections."

The meeting is being held at Howard Congregational Church United Church of Christ in Nashville, Tennessee on Friday, **September 30, 2011**. The Association will come together in "**Making Connections**" building leaders and building congregations. [Link here for additional information for the fall event.](#)

Georgia-South Carolina Association Welcomes You to the Fall Meeting!

The Fall Meeting of the Georgia-South Carolina Association will be held Saturday **October 15** from 9:30-2:30 at Pilgrimage UCC, Marietta. **Registration materials and a schedule are available at this link.** We will hold an Ecclesiastical Council to consider Laura Arnold for ordination and the reception of Kirkwood United Church of Christ into the Association. There will also be a panel discussion on Creating Holy Space. **We are looking forward to a time of celebration and sharing!**

East Alabama-West Georgia Planning Fall Association Meeting

Arrangements are still being finalized for this fall event. Circle your calendars for the date of **October 22nd** and join us at the Annual Meeting of the East Alabama-West Georgia Association. Location, details and times will be coming soon.

UCC History and Polity Class A Great Success!

Tim Downs is facilitating the third online UCC history and polity class that our conference has offered in collaboration with the Center for Progressive Renewal. We have twelve participants who are logging on from Winnipeg, Canada, London England, Nebraska, Connecticut, Arizona, Alabama, Tennessee, Georgia, North Carolina, and points in between! Many of the participants have been ordained in other traditions and have found their way to the UCC with wonder and gratitude for a denomination like ours. The class, a twelve week course, which began at the end of August, will conclude in the middle of November. Tim has said "each time I participant in an online class, I learn in a little more, and grow in appreciation for the rich possibilities for participants to engage material at so many different levels. It is truly a new and exciting way of learning."

[Link here for information on the class.](#)

Update on OCWM Promotion

September 18th was OCWM Sunday in many of our churches, and many others are arranging or have

arranged with Gerri Hudson for a speaker from the board or the staff to bring greetings and a mission moment to our churches. We continue to be available if you would like to schedule a time and speaker.

Tim Downs has spoken to **Safe Harbor Family Church, Kirkwood UCC, and Central Congregational UCC.**

Kathy Clark spoke at **Decatur UCC, and First United Church UCC, Cookeville.**

Debbie Spearman visited **Pilgrimage UCC Marietta, and Sandy Creek UCC, Lafayette, AL.**

Dorothy Gager will be speaking at **Brookmeade Congregational in Nashville,**

Jennifer Spears, spoke at **Garden of Grace, Columbia, SC.**

[Link here for additional information on OCWM.](#)


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Celebrations - September 2011



Towanda Overton, a member of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville, a graduate of Memphis theological Seminary and Leslie Etheredge’s partner, was approved to be a member in discernment in the Alabama-Tennessee Association.

Ben Konecny, student in care at First United Church of Christ, Nashville, and a recent graduate of Vanderbilt Divinity School, has been approved to appear before an ecclesiastical council, with a recommendation for the Committee on ministry that he be approved for ordination pending a call.

Scott Williamson, a member of Holy Trinity Community Church UCC, Nashville, has recently started at Vanderbilt Divinity School, and was approved as a member in discernment by the Alabama-Tennessee Committee on Ministry.

Congratulations to the **six SEC churches** who enrolled in the Center for Progressive Renewal’s 5 week online class: **"Designing a Stewardship Plan for you Church."** [Link here to read more](#) about online stewardship training.

Trinity Congregational Church UCC, Athens, AL celebrated 140 years of existence at their annual Founders’ Day Celebration, Sunday, September 4th, commemorating and celebrating the missionaries of the American Missionary Society who gave themselves so unselfishly.. The celebration began at the morning worship service at 11:00 a.m. featuring the church pastor, Rev. Gary Luther Myers, and ended with an afternoon service at 2:00 p.m. featuring Rev. Dr. Wayne P. Snodgrass of Progressive Union Missionary Baptist Church, Huntsville, AL. There was also a Fellowship Picnic on the grounds of the church on Saturday, September 3rd at 11:00 am with a portion of the proceeds going to the United Way.

Reverend Angela H. Wright, pastor of Beloved Community Church, Birmingham, AL, returned to Greater Birmingham Ministries (GBM) in early May as Faith in Community Coordinator. Faith in Community is a ministry of theological reflection coupled with active personal engagement in the struggle for a just community. GBM’s vision is a faith-based commitment to living out God’s purpose for peace and justice. Angie first worked at GBM as the first Economic Justice Organizer from 1983 to 1989. As FIC Coordinator, her hope is that she “can work closely with the board, help it function well, and really engage congregations in the work we do together.”

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No Pardon for Troy Davis



The decision of the State of Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles announced on Tuesday to allow the execution of **Troy Davis** to proceed is not a decision that advances justice in this great state, but is an echo of another and more troubled time in race relations. In the face of considerable doubt about the veracity of the testimony of witnesses, the absence of physical evidence, the Board has not brought about a just conclusion to the murder of Officer McPhail, but added to one grave injustice another.



Georgia executed Troy Davis on Wednesday night for the murder of an off-duty police officer, a crime he denied committing right to the end as supporters around the world mourned and declared that an innocent man was put to death.
[Read more.](#)

The Southeast Conference and the United Church of Christ stand in this hour with the millions who have prayed, signed petitions, and marched for justice for Troy Davis, including particularly his family and loved ones. We are proud of our churches and clergy who have continued our long tradition of fighting for justice, and we lift up with gratitude the witness of Dr. Marvin Morgan of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, Dr. Kenneth L. Samuel of Victory for the World UCC, Stone Mountain, Rev. Joyce Myers-Brown of Central Congregational UCC, Atlanta, Rev. Chris Lyman-Waldron of Praxis UCC, Atlanta, and many others

who have sought to be a light of hope in these shadowed and troubling times. May Christ grant us all strength for this journey.

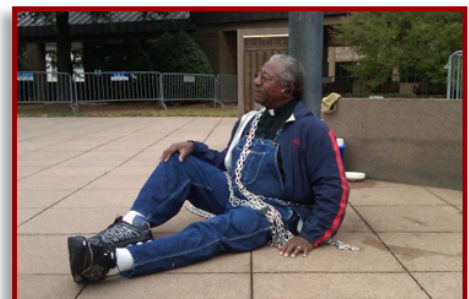
[Link here to read more information](#) on how the UCC has been involved.

Marvin Morgan of First Congregational UCC, Atlanta, chained himself to a flag pole near the state capital and began a hunger strike in protest. This same local minister renewed an offer to die in place of Troy Davis.

In a letter mailed to members of the Georgia Board of Pardons and Paroles, Marvin L. Morgan, pastor with the United Church of Christ, wrote:

"Because there remains 'reasonable doubt'; in fact, because there remains overwhelming doubt that Mr. Troy Davis is the one who murdered Officer Mark MacPhail ... I, Marvin L. Morgan, do hereby request that you authorize the state of Georgia to take my life instead of that of Troy Davis and allow Troy to be set free. I am available immediately to be taken into custody so this request may be implemented."

[A PDF of the entire letter here.](#)



A complete article appeared in Creative Loafing Atlanta on September 17. [Link here to read "I am willing to die for Troy Davis."](#)

for Troy Davis.

The Southeast Conference and the United Church of Christ are proud of our churches and clergy who have continued our long tradition of fighting for justice. The ones listed in this article are just a few of those who stepped forward in the name of justice. Kathy Clark and Joyce Hollyday represented the Conference at the vigil on the 21st the evening of Troy Davis' execution, at the prison in Jackson, and Chris Lyman-Waldron of Praxis UCC organized a response from his congregation. The national staff of the UCC was represented by Sala Nolan of Justice and Witness Ministries.

A synopsis comes to us from Joyce Hollyday on the events leading up to the execution and beyond.

Amazing Grace

I had to serpentine my way around a row of massive concrete barricades on Sunday morning, September 25, to get to the prison that houses Georgia's death row. Four days before, this line of defense was upstaged by an army of prison guards, sheriff's deputies, state troopers, and riot police wearing blackened face shields and bearing high-powered rifles. A helicopter hovered overhead, and throughout the evening, police cruisers roared past the crowd, their lights flashing and sirens blaring. In all my years, I'd never seen such a massive display of force.

[Link here to read Joyce's complete article.](#)



The SEC and UCC Respond as Hundreds of Homes are Destroyed in Waves of Severe Weather

This is an Alert on How You May Assist in This Time of Need

Devastating storms Wednesday spawned deadly tornadoes that moved across

Mississippi, Georgia and Alabama. The purpose of this email is to alert you to the ways in which you and your congregation may respond to this catastrophe and to let you know how the **Southeast Conference** is responding. Currently, UCC churches across the Southeast Conference are providing immediate relief in their communities to those in need of food and water.



AFP/Getty Images - Jessica McGowan

The United Church of Christ's Disaster Ministries anticipates participating in an ecumenical effort to assist people to repair and rebuild homes.

Georgia Gov. Nathan Deal declared four northwestern counties disaster areas after storms and tornadoes blew through the area. Governors of Mississippi and Alabama

also declared disaster areas, emergency management officials said.

In Alabama, the National Guard dispatched hundreds of personnel to some of the state's hardest hit areas. President Barack Obama announced late Wednesday he approved Alabama Gov. Robert Bentley's request for emergency federal assistance, including search and rescue support.

"While we may not know the extent of the damage for days, we will continue to monitor these severe storms across the country and stand ready to continue to help the people across the southeast and all citizens affected by these storms," Obama said in a statement. Most of the 154 tornado sightings reported to the Storm Prediction Center in Norman, Oklahoma, were from Alabama, Mississippi, Georgia, and Tennessee, AccuWeather.com reported.

From Tim Downs - Here is What is Currently Happening:

1. The **United Church of Christ** has launched an emergency appeal to the entire church, and it is posted on www.ucc.org.

2. I have appointed [Angie Wright](#) and **LeNard Brown** to be our coordinators in response to this disaster, and I am working with our colleague in the national offices to get them the credentials they need to have access to the sites of damage.

3. Gifts are Being Given via Congregations in "Special Offerings."

If you wish to send contributions through the [Southeast Conference](#) we will also accept checks made out to "Southeast Conference UCC", and note in the memo **"OGHS Alabama Tornado Relief."** You may donate online at the SEC by clicking button to the right.

4. Through **One Great Hour of Sharing** the SEC has already requested a \$2000 grant in aid to each of our churches which have members that have incurred losses in the tornadoes.

5. Online Donations are Being Made.

Make a secure online donation to the [OGHS International Disaster Relief Fund](#). Mark the gift being made for **"OGHS Tornado Relief."**



OGHS Alabama Tornado Relief

6. Clean Up and Hygiene Kits are Being Donated.

Support of this program helps to ensure kits are available for immediate response after a disaster in another part of the world and here in the United States. For more information on kits follow link to [Church World Service](#) organization.

Our SECUCC Members:

A number of you have asked what impact the tornadoes have had on our churches and their membership. This is what I know:

- > Two families in Beloved Community UCC, Birmingham have lost their homes.
- > Two families of Trinity Congregational UCC, Athens, AL have had significant damage, one family lost their home and car, and another lost the roof on their house.
- > One member of United Church Huntsville had a tree go through her roof. The church is mobilizing to help secure her house and prevent further damage.
- > Two families of Church of the Savior UCC, Knoxville sustained damage to homes.

Please Pray for people who live in communities affected by tornadoes. Feel free to be in touch with me for any further information or details.

Thank you for your compassion and support.

[Timothy C. Downs](#)

[Timothy J. Downs](#)
Conference Minister

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- ▶ United Church of Christ
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EVENTS CALENDAR

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S	M	T	W	T	F	S
25	26	27	28	29	30	1
2	3	4	5	6	7	8
9	10	11	12	13	14	15
16	17	18	19	20	21	22
23	24	25	26	27	28	29
30	31	1	2	3	4	5

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‘Amazing Grace’
The legacy of Troy Davis
By Joyce Hollyday

I had to serpentine my way around a row of massive concrete barricades on Sunday morning, September 25, to get to the prison that houses Georgia’s death row. Four days before, this line of defense was upstaged by an army of prison guards, sheriff’s deputies, state troopers, and riot police wearing blackened face shields and bearing high-powered rifles. A helicopter hovered overhead, and throughout the evening, police cruisers roared past the crowd, their lights flashing and sirens blaring. In all my years, I’d never seen such a massive display of force.

Just before 7 p.m., the scheduled hour of Troy Davis’ execution, the three hundred or so of us who had come to protest and pray outside the prison went to our knees and grew silent. A bell rang the hour, and someone close to where Associate Conference Minister Kathy Clark and I knelt began singing “Amazing Grace.” And then, at the other end of the line, a great cheer went up. A reprieve! Hope. It turned out to be only temporary.

Troy Davis was pronounced dead at 11:08 p.m. His last act on this earth was to ask for mercy for those who killed him. Moments later, the heavens opened up with a downpour of rain, a great, cosmic weeping for this gentle soul and a cleansing for all of us who are in need of showers of mercy.

The compelling doubt about Troy’s guilt had drawn together a community of support that included the pope, the Dalai Lama, a former U.S. president, and even conservative, pro-death-penalty members of Congress, along with hundreds of thousands of ordinary folk who signed petitions and organized protests. Four hours before the execution, Troy’s greatest advocate, his sister Martina Correia, who has been in a decade-long battle with cancer, struggled from her wheelchair to her feet, declaring, “I am standing today on behalf of my brother. I am Troy Davis.” Surrounding her was a sea of young people wearing T-shirts emblazoned with those words: “I am Troy Davis.”

Outside the prison that night, in the face of the tension and fear and overwhelming firepower, I understood the vulnerability that those young people feel. Our cruel world seems to have lost its compassion, its kindness, its moral center.

Four days later I returned to the prison to see Wiley Dobbs, who has been on death row for 38 years. I’ve been visiting him for the last 15. He was like a father to Troy.

Wiley told me the loss was going to “hurt for a long time.” But then he shared something extraordinary. “The guards all know that Troy called me Papa, and I called him Junior,” Wiley said. They make rounds of the cellblocks every hour. And all that night and during the next day, they stopped at his cell and asked, “Are you doing all right?” wanting to know if he needed anything. This is not always the behavior of prison guards, and I give thanks for this small gesture of kindness, which deeply touched my friend Wiley.

A community was conjured around a person and a cause. Our greatest hope was not realized. But if Troy’s death can move people to kindness, he did not die in vain. If we can learn to embrace the grace, patience, compassion, and forgiveness that marked his life, then we are all Troy Davis.

Rev. Joyce Hollyday is co-pastor of Circle of Mercy congregation in Asheville, NC, and a former Associate Conference Minister for the Southeast Conference. Her blog can be found at www.seekingcommunity.ca.